Power Relations and its Influence in the Sphere of Globalization since World War II

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Abstract
Although the movement of technology, information, ideas and money is not new, it has been influencing human social behaviour at an ever increasing rate by the process of globalization. Power relations in the form of a centre-periphery relationship, cultural homogenization and cultural hybridization are investigated to examine their impact on cultural exchange within the context of globalization. A centre-periphery relationship has arisen since World War II that places the United States of America at the centre and all other nation-states on the periphery. This relationship creates an unequal power dynamic that allows cultural phenomena to diffuse from the centre out to the periphery, thereby reinforcing particular ideas including capitalism and institutional development. A culture is said to be homogenized when it has become standardized around a common set of cultural traits. This process, also referred to as “Americanization”, allows for the manipulation of behaviour, an example being the use of American textbooks in Bahamian schools. The hybridization of cultures results from the incorporation of cultural elements into one’s own culture through some type of exchange. This structure of power supports the unequal exchange that no longer requires close spatiotemporal distance. Mbuti pygmies, for example, have dramatically changed the way they interact with their environment, opting instead for wage labour and the use of modern technology. Recognizing these processes that occur through unequal power relations has implications for marking cultural boundaries, ethnographic study and the destruction of particular elements of culture. Further research should focus on how power relations are benefiting or eroding the quality of life of individuals.

Keywords
Globalization, Americanization, hybridization, power relations

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Introduction

The movement of technology, information, people, ideas, and money across cultural borders are a part of the globalization processes that have had a large impact on the social behaviour of modern humans. Although it has been suggested that globalization is a new phenomenon, Robert Holton (2000) proposes that globalization that allows for trans-cultural communication has been in existence for a long period of time. Holton (2000) argues that the process of globalization began with the integration of ideas by regional groups of people through activities such as trade and exogamy. Recent advancements in technologies such as mass communication tools, transportation, and trade networks have all increased the speed at which globalization occurs while consequently decreasing the dependence of human communication on spatiotemporal distance (Jackson 2004). The construction of power at the national level has also played an important role in globalization, influencing the types of interactions experienced by different nation-states at the global level.

Within the context of globalization, Michel Foucault (1984:428) states that structural power is the authority to develop the range of actions that others can take and, in a sense, govern their consciousness by manipulating their behaviour. How do power relations between nation-states influence the exchange of cultural phenomena within the context of globalization? Since World War II, I believe that a select group of nation-states have ultimately been able to manipulate the exchange of culture\(^1\) through previously existing historical relationships, and the exploitation of other nation-states through structural power. The defeat of axis powers in World War II led to utter devastation of Western Europe and, through years of repairing desolation, a new centre of power arose in the United States of America. The United States quickly shifted to a preference for unilateral policies when dealing with international affairs, promoting capitalist enterprise through power (Kagan 2003). For example, the World Trade Organization, in association with the United States, subjected nation-states unwilling to allow for open market competition to severe fines (Toro-Hardy 2002). Structural power has led to an unequal partnership of cultural exchange by influencing globalization in the creation of a centre-periphery relationship, as well as homogenization and hybridization developments between the United States and other nation-states since World War II.

A Centre-Periphery Relationship

The unequal distribution of power among nation-states has directly resulted in the creation of a centre-periphery relationship. In Modernity and Periphery, Mary Louise Pratt (2002) claimed that replacing the centre-periphery concept with globalization was unnecessary, as it allowed the “centre” to exist without proper acknowledgement. I believe that understanding the concept of centre and periphery

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\(^1\) Robert Brightman (1995) renders nation-states as an illegitimate way to represent a “culture” by stating that culture is a boundless abstraction that cannot be placed within a specific locality. While this argument is valid, I believe that distinct patterns of behaviour can be grouped in many ways. The definition of culture that will be used for the purpose of this research is described by Robert Holton (2000:142), who refers to culture broadly as all learned behaviour. I have considered behaviour that occurs in distinct patterns that can be grouped generally by nation-states as culture.
is crucial, as the relationships between nation-states that are formed around its principles exemplify how power relations influence modern globalization processes. Pratt (2002) describes the centre as existing in Northern Europe and North America, and identifies features such as capitalism, mass culture, and the need for an “other” to exist. Northern Europe includes “Nordic” countries such as Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, as well as the United Kingdom. While Pratt (2002) identifies Northern Europe as a part of the centre in her model, I believe that this is no longer the case. Estes (2004) states that Europe is undergoing fundamental changes due to social, political, and economic events that occur outside of its region. Furthermore, the emergence of North American trade has made it difficult for Europe to compete in the global market (Estes 2004:123). Katzenstrein (2005) adds that American culture has become prominent and intermingled within Europe, as well as other nation-states. Although Pratt (2002) refers to the centre as North America, I will consider the centre to be the United States. While I agree that the cultural exchange involves North American ideas and technology, which makes it difficult to distinguish between Canadian and American cultural constructs, I believe that the United States has a greater share of power in globalizing processes than Canada. This is supported by Hoberg (2000:37), who asserts that it is difficult for Canadians to maintain a distinct culture with pressures of acculturation from the United States. Acculturation is defined by Nelson and Teske (1974:351) as the modification of a culture resulting from contact from another culture. Therefore, the distinct impact of power relations between the United States and other nation-states will be considered. The periphery is described as the remainder of nation-states that are considered to be “behind” and “outside” the centre. Additionally, these nation-states are often considered primitive and underdeveloped (Pratt 2002:29).

Using the centre-periphery perspective, the centre then proceeds to diffuse its ideas, through the use of structural power, to the periphery. Thus, this power relation between America as the centre, and the remainder of the world as the periphery, impacts the amount of cultural contribution made by the respective nation-state. In The Age of Villages, Toro-Hardy (2002) explains the overwhelming power of the United States and its ability to have its cultural presence felt in every area of the world. The initiation of international trade eventually allowed information to flow between Japan and the western world, which laid the foundations for radical transformation within the nation-state. As a result, Japan built a modern economy and institutions that were adapted to the ideas of the United States (Toro-Hardy 2002:97). An institution is any structure that manages the behaviour of individuals that is a fundamental part of the culture for a particular group of people (Toro-Hardy 2002). The centrality given to America also allows concepts such as modernity, which includes two prominent ideas in North American culture, capitalism and democracy, to be diffused to the periphery with unyielding authority (Pratt 2002). For example, the United States continues its attempt to create a stable model of democracy based on western constructs in Iraq (Kagan 2003). The power relationship also had grand cultural effects on European countries, such as Italy. Beginning in 1950, many American products were sent to Italy and were displayed in public venues, which ultimately led to changes in architecture and domestic goods (Scrivano 2005:326). While
cultural exchange is a product of globalization that has existed for many years, I believe that an unequal exchange of ideas has occurred between the United States and other nation-states. This is further illustrated by Scrivano (2005:326), who observed that American ideas of Italy, as a country not fully industrialized, had remained similar for decades.

Based on the available evidence, I have argued that American cultural values were exchanged in a way with other nation-states that demonstrated a centre-periphery approach. The centre-periphery approach demonstrates the asymmetrical exchange of culture that favoured the centre, the United States, and reveals how influential the relations of power are in modern globalization. While I believe that power relations have created an unbalanced cultural exchange between the United States and other nation-states, further research must be completed to investigate how American culture has been inversely influenced by other nation-states to fully understand globalization.

It can be argued that centre-periphery relationships have existed prior to the centre-periphery relationship involving the United States and other nation-states. Debray (2004) reveals a similar power structure among the Romans and their conquered territory as is observed between the United States and other periphery nation-states. He compares becoming a Roman in the first century to becoming an American in the twenty-first century, as graduation from the status of a slave to that of a man with a greater share of power (Debray 2004:34). This statement reveals that relationships of unequal power have existed in the past, and consequently influenced the exchange of culture. However, this comparison to past centre-periphery relationships does not deny the unique impact that the current relationship between America as the centre and the remainder of the nation-states as the periphery has had on modern globalization processes. The pre-existence of centre-periphery relationships prior to modern globalizing processes further illustrates how power influences the exchange of culture. Globalization is now occurring at increased speeds due to technological improvements with the growth of communication and media technology, which now accounts for 60% of American Gross Domestic Product (GDP). GDP refers to the final value of goods and services produced within a nation-state (Toro-Hardy 2002:101). For this reason, I believe that the power structure created by a current centre-periphery relationship will impact globalization processes, such as the exchange of ideas, to a greater extent than has occurred before the Second World War.

**Cultural Homogenization Processes**

The greater influence of power relations between nation-states is further reinforced by homogenization of culture. According to Robert Holton (2000), culture is said to be homogenized when it has become standardized around a common pattern. I will argue that a common set of cultural traits around an American pattern of behaviour has developed in some aspects that reflect the imbalance of power between the United States and other nation-states. Globalization is often referred to as a homogenization resulting from “Americanization”, or influence from the culture of the United States (Holton 2000:142). I believe that the homogenization of some cultural elements has developed largely through the efforts of American capitalism and communication through media. Mahon (2000) adds how important media is in cultural influence at both the local and global levels. American capitalism also contributed to the development of multinational corporations, which operate in
many nation-states, but reproduce aspects of culture from their respective countries of origin. Furthermore, communication enabled by technology has persuaded some nation-states that American goods and services are representative of high status, which impact how these products, ideas, and services are received in a particular nation-state (Holton 2000:142). In Japan, Brown and Traphagan (2002) suggest that the introduction of fast food restaurants such as McDonald’s and Kentucky Fried Chicken reflect changes in Japanese eating behaviour and overall diet. I believe that multinational companies, including McDonald’s, portray aspects of American culture that are consequently transferred through various media that directly manipulate behaviour and contribute to the process of Americanization. Ultimately, the power of the United States in a capitalist world economy has enabled homogenization of culture to occur after World War II.

In the later decades of the twentieth century, American culture also gained popularity in Europe. Schröter (2007) referred to the United States as the “reference” culture, establishing its superiority through capitalist ventures that enabled an increase in power for the nation-state. In Europe, the collapse of socialism left American ideas of growth and economic competition unchallenged (Schröter 2007). Shifts toward American cultural homogenization also occurred in information technology and communications, with Schröter (2007:226) observing that Europeans who wanted to use media tools like the internet had to do so using American design, behaviour, and language. Cultural homogenization is also observed in the Bahamas, where there are fifty American television channels for each Bahamian channel (Urwick 2002:163). Additionally, American textbooks continue to be used in the education system, although teachers do not favour the identified culturally inappropriate material (Urwick 2002:163). Urwick (2002:164) further emphasizes that most Bahamians appear happy to emulate the American lifestyle. I believe that education systems have a major impact on the behaviours an individual partakes in. The use of American textbooks in primary schools would have a large influence on the social development of Bahamian children. It is clear in the examples that power relations, particularly those between the United States and others, influence the cultural exchange through homogenization of some aspects of culture in various nation-states. While it is clear that homogenization has occurred in particular nation-states, there is not sufficient evidence to determine that homogenization of culture is a universal phenomenon.

I believe that the homogenization of culture towards a standardized American way of life has occurred in particular nation-states, but that the power of the United States has been reflected in dissimilar ways in different nation-states. Craig, Douglas, and Greene (2005) found that American films were more successful in countries with a culture more similar to that of the United States. While film only represents one aspect of cultural representation, I agree that the amount of homogenization that occurs between the United States and another nation-state would be partly reflective of the similarities between behaviour prior to modern globalization. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that some similarities have developed, even in nation-states separated by a large geographical distance, that are reflective of the power to affect behaviour that the United States has. For example, the ability to impact eating habits and diet in Japan reveals how modern technology has decreased the dependence on distance for communication while subsequently increasing the amount of
Cultural Hybridization Processes

The word “hybrid” has been used to describe both biological and social phenomena. Stross (1999:254) believes that the biological and social use of the term “hybridization” is similar because both terms have been socially constructed. I believe that it is important to differentiate between the meanings of the term to avoid using a model of cultural exchange that follows a sociobiological construct. On the one hand, biological hybridization involves reproduction mechanisms of two organisms, which combine in an equal manner. On the other hand, social hybridization does not involve equality, which enables its use to describe cultural elements that have been incorporated through cultural exchange. Cultural hybridization does not assume that equal parts of cultural items are exchanged and thus, a relationship of power exists in the processes in which cultural transformation occurs.

Cultural hybridization also demonstrates how power relations have influenced the process of cultural exchange within the sphere of globalization. Cultural hybridization refers to the incorporation of cultural elements from one culture into one’s own culture through some form of exchange (Holton 2000:148). While cultural hybridization may appear to be a balanced exchange of culture, I believe that particular nation-states, including the United States of America, have the ability to reproduce more ideas and behaviour in other nation-states based on power relationships. Hybridization acknowledges the active role that humans play in shaping their experience of new behaviours and ideas (Jackson 2004). In India, Jackson (2004) found that individuals had taken American cuisine and created an Indian variation of it. For example, chilli sauces and garlic have been added to the hamburger recipes that have been introduced to India from the United States (Jackson 2004:168). Shimoni (2006) found that Latin Americans had incorporated foreign symbols and cultural meanings into their local environment. He added that Mexicans have had a difficult time maintaining their cultural identity, specifically on the northern border that is shared with the United States (Shimoni 2006). Furthermore, Israeli corporation managers readily absorbed American culture as a guideline for a successful life, claiming that traditional Israeli principles had led to the collapse of many of their corporations (Shimoni 2006:226). I agree that hybridization is one of the mechanisms of cultural exchange within modern globalization, but I do argue that the cultural transfer to the United States is small in comparison to the cultural elements it diffuses, which is a direct result of the relationships of power.

Friedman (1990) states that western power structure has been largely dismantled, but I do not believe that this is the case, as the power to influence cultural behaviour is reflected in the process of unequal cultural hybridization. Ulin (2004:155) finds that capital accumulation has dramatically transformed the life of many local communities, citing an example from the Mbuti, where western technology has changed the relationship Mbuti pygmies have with their forest. Mbuti pygmies now use metal drain pipes to interact with the forest instead of using horns and younger individuals are involved in wage labour, choosing to live only part-time in the forest environment (Ulin 2004:162). Friedman (1990:322) also acknowledges how Hawaiian traditions have been largely dismantled by their incorporation into the United States of America. While it appears that the indigenous Hawaiians have begun an anti-tourist movement with Friedman’s
(1990:323) referral to a decline in American power at the global level, he also notes that their cultural identity has already largely disappeared. I do not agree that American power has declined since 1960, especially in its own state of Hawaii. Current telecommunication technology has been developed and utilized around the world. As a result, I believe that it will be difficult for Hawaiians to culturally diversify when many traditions have already been lost as a state that is partly controlled by the American government directly. Hawaii has been shaped culturally by its integration into the modern globalized world, particularly by its connections to the United States (Sheppard 2002:308). Sheppard (2002:307) also states that Hawaii was dramatically changed with its incorporation into the United States, but that the impact of Hawaii on the western world was much more marginal and, in a sense, beneficial. This reflects how the United States has the power to benefit from the asymmetrical relationship created by incorporating Hawaii into its nation-state while Hawaiians suffer a loss of some traditions. This example from Hawaii exemplifies the larger cultural impact, resulting from information technology, on the periphery following World War II. Additionally, it also appears that the power instilled in the United States has led to cultural hybridization to a larger extent in cultures outside of America than cultural elements within its borders. Morris (2000:105) found that Mexicans viewed America as “power-hungry” and “anti-Mexican”. This perspective from America’s closest southern neighbour demonstrates the conception of the United States in some nation-states as a country resilient to hybridization through cultural exchange, as well as powerful at the global level. While the available literature suggests a low impact of cultural hybridization within the United States, further research regarding its influence in America in modern globalization processes is needed.

Limitations, Conclusions, and Future Implications

While I believe that the creation of a centre-periphery relationship, as well as the homogenization and hybridization of culture, are indications of how power has influenced cultural exchange in modern globalization processes, there are some limitations to my research. Firstly, there are several confounding variables in the processes related to globalization. The purpose of this essay was to investigate how one element of globalization, culture, was influenced by the power relationships between nation-states. Therefore, political elements and specific economic ventures were generally excluded from my research. Secondly, I believe that culture is an extremely complex area of study and therefore, there are several ways in which power relations are believed to influence the exchange of ideas and behaviour. For example, Holton (2000:147) mentions polarization as a method of cultural exchange, which acknowledges that western authority has limits in its power and that its influence is met with considerable resistance in certain cultural contexts. An example of this is observed with Islamic fundamentalists, as well as other nation-states in the Near East, where the western world is seen as the “other” (Holton 2000:146). While I acknowledge polarization processes do exist, this view is simplified by its use of a dichotomous relationship between two cultural spheres. Polarization neglects the powerful nature of hybridization and homogenization, where elements of American culture are diffused in a way that does not consider the resistance of some nation-states. As a result, countries that exemplify resistance to cultural elements from the west are still exposed to them.
through worldwide globalization. For example, the predominantly Islamic society of Iraq was still subject to American pressure to develop a democracy based on western constructs. Thirdly, in *What's Foreign and What's Familiar?*, Mary Louise Pratt (2002:1283) recognizes that humanity can be centred anywhere. Therefore, it is important to recognize that while the processes of unequal cultural exchange are supported by evidence, an individual in a particular nation-state may not recognize the United States as the centre in a centre-periphery relationship. Although I concur that the centre of power can be placed in many different localities, the majority of the evidence suggests that the United States of America is the centre of a global centre-periphery relationship. The literature discussed above illustrates how power has led to cultural diffusion from the United States to other nation-states in the modern globalized world to a high degree. Furthermore, I have attempted to represent what I consider to be the most prevalent forms of power relations that have influenced cultural exchange, namely centre-periphery relationships, as well as homogenization and hybridization processes.

Since World War II, power relations between the United States and other nation-states have impacted cultural exchange in the development of a centre-periphery relationship, as well as homogenization and hybridization processes. The centre-periphery relationship involves the movement of ideas, technology, and popular concepts such as democracy that are diffused from the centre, represented in my argument as the United States, to the periphery, represented by other nation-states. An example of cultural exchange using this model is observed between Japan and the United States, where western concepts led to a restructuring of major institutions to follow western principles, including capitalist enterprise (Toro-Hardy 2002:970). Homogenization involves the standardization of common elements of culture around a Western pattern of behaviour. Urwick (2002) found that the mass education delivered in the Bahamas had become homogenized as the textbooks used in schools were published in America. This has resulted in a greater majority of the population satisfied to imitate the American way of life (Urwick 2002). Hybridization of culture is the absorption of specific cultural elements into one’s own culture through a process of cultural exchange. In *Local Consumption Cultures in a Globalizing World*, Jackson (2004:168) reiterates how hamburger recipes incorporated into Indian diet from the United States contained common spices in Indian food, such as garlic and chilli sauces. In my opinion, centre-periphery relationships, homogenization, and hybridization are all types of cultural influence that reflect how increased global power in the United States affects the process of globalization.

Identifying how the relationships of power affect nation-states has many implications for studies of culture. Firstly, the identification of how cultural exchange is imbalanced affects the possibility of marking boundaries between cultures. Although past literature has often identified culture by nation-states, as was also done in this research paper, Brightman (1995) demonstrates that bounding culture to a specific locality has become difficult in the modern globalized world. Secondly, questions can be raised to examine if there is an “indigenous” culture that can be accessed by effectively eliminating the relationships a culture has to other cultures. The relationship of power between nation-states has had such a grand influence in cultural exchange that to ignore these relationships would aid in misunderstanding the ideas and
behaviour that individuals partake in. Thirdly, these structures of power have potentially destructive implications for periphery cultures. I have argued that centre-periphery relationships, as well as homogenization and hybridization, are effectively eliminating cultural elements. While further investigation is required, I agree with Brightman (1995) in stating that culture is an abstraction. Thus, the cultural “elements” that can be grouped are dynamic, and would likely change overtime regardless of the processes of power that have influenced the exchange of culture. Finally, it could be investigated whether power relations between nation-states have affected the quality and satisfaction some groups of people have in life. Further research should be focused on how power relations are benefitting or eroding the quality of life of individuals. Human agency, or the capacity for people to make choices, should also be examined to see if individuals are impacted in the same way as behaviour and ideas are impacted by power in the modern globalized world. It is clear that power relationships between the United States and other nation-states, as well as the processes that have resulted from it, have impacted culture in the globalized world. However, it is important to be aware that the processes of power are dynamic and will continue to influence cultural exchange in the future.

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